

ABRAHAM LINCOLN
A Concise Biography



All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother—
blessings on her memory.

Abraham Lincoln

The Boy Lincoln and His Mother

By M. Leone Bracker

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY

By

LOUIS A. WARREN, Litt. D.

Historian, The Lincoln National Life Insurance Co.

Director, Lincoln National Life Foundation

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THE LINCOLN NATIONAL LIFE
INSURANCE COMPANY
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*“Great captains, with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes;
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame,
The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.”*

. —From the Commemoration Ode
by JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

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Kentucky—First Seven Years, 1809-1816

Parentage and Childhood

Abraham Lincoln was born on Sunday, February 12, 1809. The humble cabin birthplace stood close by a noted cave spring in what is now LaRue County, Kentucky. It was like most of the log buildings in which the pioneers lived—no better, no worse.

The parents of Abraham, Thomas and Nancy Hanks Lincoln, were descendants of honorable and intelligent Virginians. They were married on June 12, 1806, at Beechland, Washington County, Kentucky, in the community where they grew up. The father, although uneducated, was able to write his name in a good legible hand, and the mother was a ready reader. Both were deeply religious and became active members of an anti-slavery church.

The Lincolns' first child, Sarah, was about two years older than Abraham, and a third child, Thomas, Jr., died in infancy. When Abraham was two years of age, the family moved to a more productive farm, situated on Knob

Creek, eight miles north of the birthplace. The parents were poor, like most of the pioneers, but they were never poverty stricken. Thomas Lincoln was in possession of between seven and eight hundred acres of land when Abraham was born, and one year listed four horses for taxation.

A log school house which Sarah and Abraham attended for two terms stood on the Old Cumberland Road, a mile and a half from their home. Their teachers were Zachariah Riney and Caleb Hazel, who were well qualified to serve as their instructors.

Indiana—Fourteen Formative Years, 1816-1830

Youth

In the fall of 1816 the Lincolns migrated to Indiana and settled in what is now Spencer County. Two years later a scourge known as "milk sickness" swept the community and claimed among its victims the mother of Abraham Lincoln. She died on October 5, 1818, and was buried on a hill just opposite the cabin home.

In the month of December, 1819, Thomas Lincoln visited Kentucky and while there married the Widow Johnston. By her first husband there were three children, Elizabeth, Matilda, and John D., whose ages were 12, 8, and 4 years respectively. These children were reared in the Indiana cabin with the Lincoln orphans—Sarah, aged 12, and Abraham, age 10. Another orphan, Dennis Hanks, some years older than the other children, also found a home with the Lincolns.

Three brief terms of school taught by Andrew Crawford, James Swaney, and Azel W. Dorsey, in order named, were attended by Abraham Lincoln in Indiana. He had as much schooling as the average pioneer boy. Dilworth's Speller, Murray's English Reader, and Pike's Arithmetic were the principal schoolbooks. The Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, Aesop's Fables, Weems's Washington, Weems's Marion, Ramsey's Washington, Scott's Lessons, Columbia Class Book, and the Kentucky Preceptor were some of the books which came into Abraham's hands during his school days.

When Abraham was sixteen years of age, he secured work on a ferry boat at the mouth of Anderson River, twelve miles from his home. Three years later, as a hired hand, he made a trip down the Ohio River on a flatboat, and for the first time observed slaves sold over the auction block, which deeply impressed him. Just about the time of this river trip in 1828, his sister, Sarah Lincoln Grigsby, died, so that only Abraham and his father were left of the original family that came to Indiana from Kentucky. Upon Lincoln's return from New Orleans he served as a clerk in a country store. The proprietor was a great admirer of Henry Clay and subscribed for some Whig newspapers which greatly influenced Abraham. A history of the United States, biographies of Clay and Webster, the Statutes of Indiana, and many other books of importance were read by Lincoln at this time.

Fourteen years, or one quarter of Lincoln's whole life, were spent in the Indiana wilderness. Here he grew from a child seven years of age to a man twenty-one years old, when he reached his full height of six feet four inches, and is said to have weighed two hundred pounds. He ex-

celled in all kinds of athletics, and his great strength has become proverbial.

Illinois Country—Seven Years, 1830-1837

Young Manhood

On March 1, 1830, Thomas Lincoln and twelve others, including his wife, his son Abraham, and the stepchildren with their families, set out for Illinois. No children resulted from his second marriage. Upon arriving at a point near Decatur, Abraham helped his father build a cabin, assisted in fencing the place, and then left home to make his own way in the world.

A second flatboat trip was made to New Orleans in 1831, and upon his return Abraham was employed as a clerk in a store at New Salem, Illinois. Here he cast his first vote on August 1, 1831, and also served as clerk of the election. Seven months later, at the age of twenty-three, he announced himself a candidate for the Legislature, and his written platform reveals an orderly presentation of the issues before the people. Shortly after his announcement, the Black Hawk War broke out. Lincoln enlisted immediately and was elected captain of his company. He was mustered out at Whitewater, Wisconsin, without seeing active service. Arriving back in New Salem a few days before the election, with little opportunity to campaign in a race where four were to be elected, he ran seventh in the group of ten candidates.

The first independent business venture in which Lincoln engaged was a partnership in a store. This led to his ap-

pointment as postmaster for the town of New Salem, but the store failed, and the post office was discontinued. In the meantime he had become a Deputy Surveyor of Sangamon County.

The choice of a profession, political success, and romance all began in Lincoln's life about the same time: encouraged by his friend, John T. Stuart, he commenced to study law in earnest; running again for the Legislature in 1834, he was one of the four victorious candidates; and, after paying some attention to Ann Rutledge, a romance of much promise ended the following year with the death of his betrothed. His mother, his only sister, and his sweetheart, all were now dead.

Springfield, Illinois—First Decade, 1837-1847

Early Achievements

A new era dawned for Abraham Lincoln in 1837, when three important events occurred: His official protest against slavery was registered in the Illinois Legislature; his removal to Springfield changed his domestic life; and the law partnership formed with John T. Stuart paved the way for legal success. When Lincoln was returned to the Legislature, he became the recognized spokesman for the "Long Nine," representatives of Sangamon County—all men six feet tall or over. Elected again for the third consecutive time he became Whig floor leader. He was largely instrumental in the removal of the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield. The last two times he served in the Assembly he received the complimentary vote of the minority for Speaker of the House.

By 1840 his political influence was reaching out. He became a Presidential Elector for Harrison, and this campaign took him, in one instance, back to his native state, Kentucky. In 1844 he was Presidential Elector for Clay, and, after campaigning throughout the State of Illinois, he went to Indiana—where he grew up—and spoke in several communities. The climax of his early political efforts in Illinois was reached in 1846, when he was elected as a Whig Representative to Congress.

Political recognition also brought to Lincoln domestic attention. He first met Mary Todd of Lexington, Kentucky, at Springfield, in 1839. They were soon betrothed, but the engagement was broken in January, 1841. Drawn together again, they were married on November 4, 1842, at Springfield. Four sons, Robert, Edward, William, and Thomas or "Tad" were born to them.

With his political achievements recognized and his domestic habits established, Lincoln was not idle in building up his law practice. First he became a junior partner of John T. Stuart; later he became associated with Stephen T. Logan, as a junior partner, and in 1844 he became the senior partner of the firm of Lincoln and Hernndon. He was known as the outstanding trial lawyer in the Eighth Judicial Circuit.

Washington—A Congressional Term, 1847-1849

National Recognition

In the month of October, 1847, Abraham Lincoln left Springfield for Washington as the lone Whig Represen-

tative of the state. He took his seat in Congress on the first Monday in December. The most important act which he sponsored during his term of office was the introduction of a bill providing for the abolition of slaves in the District of Columbia. It failed to become a law, but it attracted wide attention.

His pacifist attitude towards the question involved in the Mexican War reacted greatly to his political disadvantage. He introduced the "spot resolutions" as they were termed, which severely criticized the administration for waging war against Mexico.

Lincoln's travels during this period, rather than his official duties, proved to be of more far-reaching value to him. A few weeks spent in Kentucky, while enroute to Washington, gave him a new view of slavery at work. His attendance at the Whig National Convention at Philadelphia in June, 1848, paved the way for his recognition at a later convention, and a speaking tour in New England during the fall of the same year won much favor for him.

Springfield, Illinois—Second Decade, 1849-1859

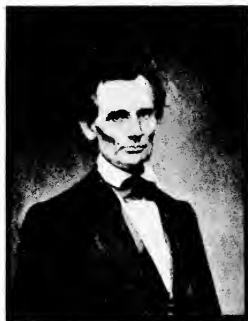
Political Awakening

Again established in Springfield, he turned aside from politics and for the next five years paid strict attention to his legal practice. This resulted in his state-wide recognition as a leader in the profession, and his retention as

● A B R A H A M L I N C O L N ●



CONGRESSMAN
1847



ORATOR
1860



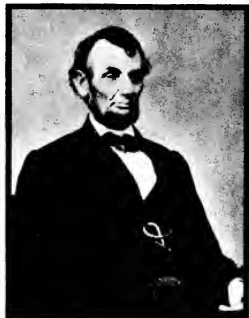
DEBATOR
1858



CANDIDATE
1860

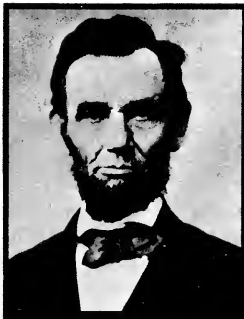
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PRESIDENT
1861



STATESMAN
1864

EMANCIPATOR
1863



MARTYR
1865

an attorney for the Illinois Central Railroad indicates his superior legal standing. The McCormick Reaper case and the Rock Island Bridge case gave him a national reputation as a lawyer. The Armstrong murder trial, in which an almanac was introduced as evidence with telling effect, won much local fame for him.

Lincoln was awakened from his political lethargy by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. This act brought to the front the slavery question which had always been of supreme interest to him. The keynote speech of his return to politics was delivered at Springfield on October 4, 1854. It was called the "Anti-Nebraska Speech." A few days later the address was repeated at Peoria in reply to Stephen A. Douglas. Upon the persuasion of his friends, in the fall of 1854, Lincoln again became a candidate for the Illinois General Assembly and was elected by a large majority. He resigned before taking his seat in order that he might become a candidate for Congress. He was defeated for this office, however, but not disheartened. The "Lost Speech" at Bloomington the following year indicated he was still alert to current political situations.

The Republican National Convention at Philadelphia in 1856 honored Lincoln by giving him one hundred and ten votes as a nominee for the vice presidency. Lincoln did not know his name was to be used, and, with no organized effort on his behalf, the nomination went to another. Encouraged by this recognition at Philadelphia, Lincoln considered running as a candidate for the United States Senate. He was nominated at the Springfield Convention, on June 16, 1858, at the time he delivered his famous

"House Divided" Speech. Lincoln challenged the opposition senatorial candidate, Stephen A. Douglas, to a series of debates. Douglas accepted and on July 30 named the places of meeting and dates of the contests as follows: Ottawa, August 21; Freeport, August 27; Jonesboro, September 15; Charleston, September 18; Galesburg, October 7; Quincy, October 13; and Alton, October 15. The major question discussed at the debates held in these Illinois towns was "Should slavery be extended in the United States and Territories?" Although Lincoln received a popular majority of over 4,000 votes in the general election, an unjust division of political districts gave Douglas fifty-four votes to Lincoln's forty-six when the Assembly was finally organized.

Springfield, Illinois—Campaign Year, 1860

Election to the Presidency

On February 27, 1860, at "Cooper Institute" in New York, Lincoln made the most far-reaching address of his career. Then followed his second speaking itinerary in New England where he made eleven addresses. He returned to Springfield, Illinois, a prospective nominee for the presidency of the United States. The Illinois Republican Convention convened at Decatur on May 9 and 10. At the most critical moment two rails split by Lincoln near Decatur in 1830 were brought into the convention bearing this legend: "Abraham Lincoln—The Rail candi-

date—For President in 1860.” The delegates went wild for Lincoln.

The Republican National Convention, which met at the Chicago Wigwam one week later, borrowed much of its enthusiasm from the Decatur meeting. Sentiment for Lincoln was at full tide and could not be stayed. On the third ballot he was named the choice of the Convention. In the campaign which followed no political speeches were made by Lincoln. On June 20 he appeared for the last time as a practitioner in the United States Circuit Court at Springfield. On the sixth day of November, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected the sixteenth president of the United States of America. The electoral college gave Lincoln 180 votes; Breckinridge, 72 votes; Bell, 39 votes; and Douglas, 12 votes.

Between the election and his departure from Springfield for the Inaugural, Lincoln absented himself from his home town just twice. Once he went to Chicago for a conference with Vice President-Elect Hannibal Hamlin, and just before his departure for Washington he journeyed to Coles County to bid farewell to his stepmother. On February 11, 1861, the day before he became fifty-two years of age, he spoke his farewell words to the citizens of Springfield, and on February 23 reached Washington.

The new family which occupied the White House consisted of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln and their three sons, Robert, William, and Thomas or “Tad,” ages seventeen, ten, and eight respectively. Robert, however, was away at school. President Lincoln’s official family comprised the following men: William H. Seward, Secretary of State; Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury;

Simon Cameron, Secretary of War; Edward Bates, Attorney General; Montgomery Blair, Postmaster General; Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy; and Caleb B. Smith, Secretary of the Interior.

Washington—First Inaugural Year, 1861

Wise Diplomacy

It is said that never before had there been so many people in Washington as on March 4, 1861, the day of President Lincoln's inauguration. The oath of office was administered by Chief Justice Robert E. Taney, the inaugural address was read, and the event which had been approached with so much foreboding passed into history with no hostile demonstration.

Before the November, 1860, election a secession movement was under way in the South. By the time Lincoln arrived in Washington, a provisional government had been set up by seven of the slave states and called "The Confederate States of America." Fort Sumter, located within the boundaries of the new Confederacy, became the focal point of interest. Here, on the morning of April 12, the first gun of the Civil War was fired, and the Fort was reduced by the Confederate batteries.

On April 15, 1861, President Lincoln called for 75,000 militia, and hostilities began. Four days later he ordered a blockade affecting southern ports, and on May 3 issued another appeal for volunteers. An extra session of Congress had also been called to cope with the emergency situation.

The first important battle of the war was fought at Bull Run on July 21, and it resulted in the routing of the Union forces. This defeat was followed by a proclamation issued on August 12, setting aside a day of "public prayer, humiliation, and fasting." Another early crisis in the war was the removal of two Confederate envoys from the British mail packet Trent. Through Lincoln's wise diplomacy a serious breach with England was averted and her neutrality assured.

Washington—Emancipation Year, 1862

National and Domestic Burdens

Very early in 1862 Lincoln began to take more initiative in the conduct of the civil strife, and on January 15 Edward M. Stanton replaced Cameron as Secretary of War. For the first time the President himself used his power as Commander-in-Chief of the armies, and issued War Order Number One on January 27. Military operations became more favorable on both land and sea. The Monitor vanquished the Merrimac in March, and in April the army won an important battle at Shiloh with possibly a greater victory occurring that same month in the capture of New Orleans. The fall offensive brought the victory at Antietam, but in the winter the horrible massacre of Union troops at Fredericksburg occurred.

Domestic affairs added to the burden of the Chief Executive. The day after he had issued a proclamation that the farewell address of Washington be read on February 22, Lincoln's son, Willie, died. While the President did

not recover soon from this tragedy, the mental collapse of his wife, hastened by this shock, was even a greater trial.

Lincoln's original plan to save the Union was to buy the slaves from their owners and set them free. This proposal was called compensated emancipation. Two direct appeals to support this proposal were made by the President to delegates from the southern states, and one-half of the entire subject matter of his annual message to Congress comprised a detailed plan for putting the project in operation. Congress, however, refused to adopt his recommendation, and, with no prospect of his policy being accepted, he issued, on September 22, his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, its provisions to become effective on January 1, 1863.

Washington—Gettysburg Year, 1863

Military Difficulties and Triumphs

The chief concern which confronted Lincoln in 1863 was the leadership of the troops: McClellan had been disappointing; Burnside was replaced by Hooker; Halleck's antagonism caused Hooker to resign; Mead replaced Hooker. About the time these generals were being shifted the southern army entered Pennsylvania, and three days after Mead's appointment, he met Lee at Gettysburg July 1, 2, and 3 and defeated him. Lincoln felt that this battle, with proper generalship, should have closed the war.

What Lincoln said at Gettysburg in November will be remembered much longer than what Mead did there in

July. The year 1863 will go down in the annals of history as productive of three important writings which Abraham Lincoln contributed to civilization: the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, the first Annual Thanksgiving Proclamation issued on October 3, and the Gettysburg Address on November 19. Freeing a whole race from bondage, establishing a great national holiday, and composing the most outstanding address of the century within a space of twelve months makes the year 1863 a memorable one in Lincoln's life.

Washington—Presidential Year, 1864

Administration Confirmed

With Vicksburg and the campaign in East Tennessee recalled, Lincoln made Ulysses S. Grant Lieutenant-General on February 29, 1864. He had already set in motion the draft of 500,000 men; later on he called for 500,000 volunteers, and proposed concluding the war as soon as it was physically possible.

The presidential year loomed up, however, as a real barrier to concerted military action. A restless and often rebellious Cabinet contained at least one ambitious candidate for President. Before the year closed, it was reorganized with Fessenden, Speed, and Usher succeeding Chase, Bates, and Blair.

The committee appointed at Chicago to arrange for the 1864 Convention, strange to say, did not call a Republican gathering but a Union convention. The delegates as-

sembled at Baltimore on June 7 and nominated Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, for President and Andrew Johnson, a Democrat, for Vice-President. The results of the election on November 8 reveal that out of the 233 electoral votes Lincoln received 212, and General McClellan, the opposing candidate, received but 21.

In 1864 there seemed to be an unusual number of desertions, and an ever-increasing number of appeals for clemency from wives and mothers. It was at this time also that there was called to Lincoln's attention the case of the Widow Bixby's loss, which caused him to write the letter of sympathy, delivered to her on Thanksgiving Day, 1864.

Washington—Second Inaugural Year, 1865

Martyrdom

When the year 1865 dawned it was clear that the end of hostilities was near. Overtures for peace had been made in 1864, but the Jacques-Gilmore mission and the Horace Greeley effort had both failed. Early in 1865, F. P. Blair succeeded in arranging a conference at Hampton Roads between three Confederate envoys and the Union representatives, Lincoln and Seward. The envoys talked about an armistice, but Lincoln demanded that all forces hostile to the Government should disband, and the interview ended without accomplishing the desired results. Two days later, upon his return to Washington, the President called his Cabinet together and again urged a bill providing for compensated emancipation, but his pleadings were ignored.

An English literary critic has called the Second Inaugural Address, delivered by Abraham Lincoln on March 4, 1865, the outstanding state paper of the Nineteenth Century. It sounded a new note in statesmanship. While promising victory to the North, it assured charity to all.

Before the month of March was over Grant began his final drive on the Confederate capital, and Sherman was marching to the sea. On April 4 Lincoln visited Richmond which had been evacuated two days before, and five days later—April 9, 1865—Lee surrendered at Appomattox.

On Good Friday, April 14, 1865, with plans for reconstruction already under way, Abraham Lincoln was struck down by an assassin. He died the following day at 7:22 a. m. without regaining consciousness.

The obsequies of Abraham Lincoln have been recorded in the annals of American history as the most elaborate funeral cortege which ever moved among the people. Lincoln's remains were taken over a sixteen hundred mile route from Washington, D. C., to Springfield, Illinois. Services were held in the larger cities, and it is estimated that a million people viewed the martyr's body. On May 4, 1865, he was buried in Springfield, Illinois, where a colossal tomb now marks his resting place.

*“ And so they buried Lincoln? Strange and vain—
Has any creature thought of Lincoln hid
In any vault 'neath any coffin lid,
In all the years since that wild spring of pain?
'Tis false—he never in the grave hath lain,
You could not bury him although you slid
Upon his clay the giant pyramid
Or heaped it with the Rocky Mountain chain.”*

—JAMES T. MCKAY.

LINCOLN HOME SITES

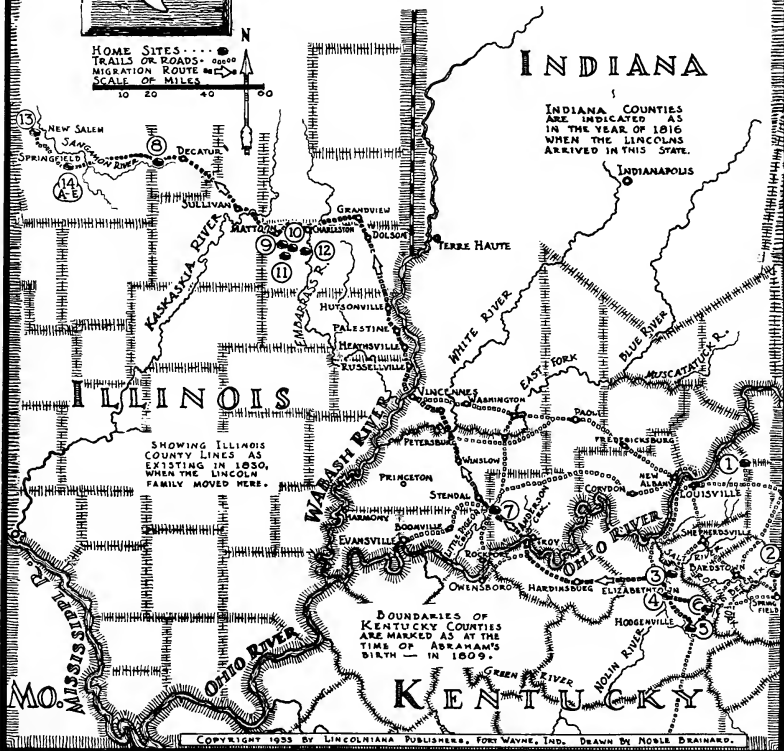


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THIS SHOWS TWELVE HOMES OF THOMAS LINCOLN—FOUR, PRIOR TO ABRAHAM'S BIRTH, FOUR, DURING THE YOUTH'S FORMATIVE YEARS, FOUR, AFTER THE SON LEFT HOME. ALSO, ABRAHAM'S HOMES FROM THE BEGINNING

OF HIS CAREER UNTIL HIS INAUGURAL TRIP TO WASHINGTON. THESE SITES WERE VERIFIED BY RESEARCH OF THE LINCOLN NATIONAL LIFE FOUNDATION, FORT WAYNE, IND., UNDER THE DIRECTION OF DR. LOUIS A. WARREN.

HOME SITES . . . ●
TRAILS OR ROADS . . . ———
MIGRATION ROUTE . . . ———
SCALE OF MILES
10 20 40



EXPLANATION

Numbers 1, 2, 3, 4—Home sites of Thomas Lincoln before the birth of his son Abraham. No. 5—Birthplace of Abraham Lincoln. No. 6—Location of Lincoln's childhood home. No. 7—Hoosier home of the Lincolns. No. 8—First Illinois home site. Numbers 9, 10, 11, 12—Thomas Lincoln's Illinois homes. No. 13—Abraham's home during early Illinois years. No. 14—Final home and burial place of Lincoln.

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